

# THE FACTS ON JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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## THE FACTS ON JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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# Introduction

## 1

### Who are the Jehovah's Witnesses?

The Jehovah's Witnesses are a religious movement started by Charles Taze Russell in the late 1870s. In formulating their beliefs, Russell drew from many sources, including the religious teachings of the Seventh-Day Adventist church, Christadelphianism, and his own interpretation of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Through aggressive door-to-door proselytizing and authoritarian leadership, the group has grown from a small number of students to allegedly more than 7 million members in over 200 countries and territories.<sup>2</sup>

## 2

### Who are the leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses?

The leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses are a group of men who head an organization called the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, or simply the Watchtower Society, in Brooklyn, New York. This small group wields absolute spiritual authority over the members. To date, the Society has had six presidents, each of whom has left his unique mark on the Society's religion.

## 3

### How have the Watchtower Society's presidents shaped the organization?

Each president of the Jehovah's Witnesses has

governed authoritatively. As a result, his period of rule has been marked by his unique personality and Bible interpretation. Thus there have been six distinct “periods” of the Society: 1) the period of Charles Taze Russell (1872–1916); 2) the period of “Judge” Joseph F. Rutherford (1917–1942); 3) the period of Nathan H. Knorr (1942–1977); 4) the period of Frederick W. Franz (1977–1992); 5) the period of Milton G. Henschel (1992–2000); and 6) the period of Don Adams (2000–present).

Because the Witnesses claim that God himself was and is the source or author of all their Bible interpretations and doctrines, it is important to briefly discuss these six periods. Doing so reveals the fact that each president has interpreted the Bible *differently* or even in *contradiction* to one or more of the others. Examining the writings of these men clearly shows that the claim of the Jehovah’s Witnesses that God is the author of all of the Watchtower Society’s doctrines is inaccurate.

### Not of God

The Bible teaches that “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33 NASB). This is the first item of evidence that reveals that the Watchtower Society is guided not by God, but by fallible men.

### Charles Taze Russell

Examples of this start with Charles Taze Russell, the Society’s founder, who wrote a new Bible for the faithful of his day. In it, he claimed the translation “came from God through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> This was the seven-volume *Studies in the Scriptures*.<sup>4</sup> He insisted this material was absolutely necessary for a proper understanding of the Bible. In the Society’s



primary publication, the *Watchtower* magazine, Russell stated categorically that without *Studies in the Scriptures* a person could never “see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself.” Further, he made the incredible claim that even after reading *Studies in the Scriptures* for ten years, if a person stopped reading it and went to “the Bible alone,” that “within two years he [would revert] into darkness.” On the other hand, a person who never read the Bible but only read Russell’s volumes “would be in the light at the end of two years because he would have had the light of the Scriptures.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, Russell claimed that a new divine interpreter was needed to understand the Bible properly. And he claimed to be that interpreter.

Yet today’s leaders of the Watchtower Society contradict many of Russell’s doctrines and “divine interpretations” of Scripture. Apparently, the true “divine interpreter” has changed. It is now no longer Russell but the Watchtower Society itself. It still claims the same authority Russell did: that only its interpretations of the Bible are authoritative, and if a person studies the Bible alone it will lead to darkness and heresy. For example, a 1981 issue of the *Watchtower* condemns those who

say that it is sufficient to read the Bible exclusively, either alone or in small groups at home. Through such “Bible reading,” they have reverted right back to the apostate doctrines that commentaries by Christendom’s clergy were teaching 100 years ago.<sup>6</sup>

Notice that the Watchtower Society itself declares, as did Russell, that anyone who reads the Bible alone will come to the same beliefs orthodox Christians have always held. Nevertheless, the writings Russell once called

indispensable for understanding the Bible (his own) are today largely ignored by the organization he founded.

### The problem with reading just the Bible

Cal Lehman, a former 35-year Jehovah's Witness, noted, "The more Bible reading I did, without Watchtower publications to stir my thinking, the more errors I began to see in the teachings of the Watchtower." His comment is only one of many such examples.<sup>7</sup>

#### J.F. Rutherford

Under the direction of the second president, "Judge" Rutherford, the Watchtower Society became even more authoritarian. Rutherford instituted an era of changes and ignored, altered, or denied hundreds or thousands of Russell's teachings. He justified these changes by claiming an ongoing revelation that permitted him to shed new light on Russell's ideas.<sup>8</sup>

This is why thousands of faithful followers of Russell, realizing Rutherford had abandoned Russell's teaching, left the organization. They still believed Russell's claim that he was inspired by God and felt that to change his teachings was to deny God. The broad majority of Witnesses, however, accepted the vast changes without many questions.

#### Nathan H. Knorr

During the third major era, under the organizational leadership of Nathan H. Knorr, the number of Witnesses grew from 105,000 to about 2.2 million. New stress was placed on training in the Jehovah's Witnesses' own interpretations of the Bible. A new Bible translation was produced to support their interpretations—and with it came additional changes in Bible interpretation and doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

Frederick W. Franz

The fourth era, under Frederick W. Franz, could be labeled an era of crisis because thousands of Witnesses began to examine the history of the Watchtower Society independently. As a result, they became convinced that it was not God's organization and either left it or were disfellowshipped.

President Franz's nephew, Raymond, is an example of one who has left the Watchtower. His book *Crisis of Conscience* shows why the Watchtower Society cannot be God's sole channel on earth. His text is an authoritative exposé by a key leader familiar with the inner workings of the Watchtower Society. It portrays an authoritarian group of men who go to great lengths to retain their image of divine guidance. Raymond Franz concludes that the Watchtower Society is not of God. He cites evidence that it 1) is antibiblical, 2) has given extensive false prophecies, 3) has changed its teachings and policies, 4) has engaged in lying and cover-ups, and 5) has brought destruction into the lives of some of its members.<sup>10</sup> "Most of the [Governing] Body were actually not that well versed in the Scriptures," he writes. They practiced "manipulation of Scripture and fact" to uphold their interpretations of the Bible. The emphasis was "not loyalty to God and His Word, but loyalty to the organization and its teachings."<sup>11</sup>

The Society has reacted to those who question its authority with the spiritual threat of disfellowshipping. For most Jehovah's Witnesses, disfellowshipping means friends and family in the Watchtower cannot associate with you, and it deprives you of any chance of salvation in this life (see also page 35).

Milton G. Henschel and Don Adams

The fifth president, Milton G. Henschel, stepped down in 2000 after only eight years, in the midst of a restructuring of the organization. Henschel's successor, Don Adams, became the Watchtower Society's sixth president in October 2000. The overall impact of his leadership remains to be seen.

## 4

### **What attracts people to the Jehovah's Witnesses?**

Many people are attracted to the Jehovah's Witnesses because they claim to have authoritative answers to many of life's problems. In a society torn by relative values and personal insecurities, any group is attractive that 1) claims to offer divine guidance, 2) claims to provide genuine solutions to life's problems, and 3) stresses moral and family values. The Watchtower Society is appealing to people who are looking for answers, who are frightened about the future, or who are tired of the lack of moral values in America. They are drawn to the dedication and commitment that the Witnesses show.

In addition, many people in liberal mainline churches who feel they have an inadequate level of Bible knowledge have a desire to know it better. They are grateful for the Witnesses, who devote a lot of time and effort to allegedly helping them understand what the Bible teaches on life's issues.